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Guinea

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government, controlled by a military junta between December 2008 and January 2010, generally respected religious freedom in practice, as did the transition government which replaced it on January 14, 2010. The constitution decreed by interim President Sekouba Konate in May 2010 states that the principle of religious freedom will not be subject to revision. Religious leaders continued to play critical roles in the national grassroots movement for constructive political change.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles and a population of 10 million. Approximately 85 percent of the population is Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 5 percent holds indigenous religious beliefs. Muslims are generally Sunni, although the few Shi'a are increasing in number. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and a few evangelical groups. There is a small Baha'i community. There are also small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religious beliefs among foreign residents.

Some Muslims and Christians incorporate indigenous beliefs and rituals into their religious practices.

Muslims constitute a majority in all four major regions. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the south, and in the eastern Forest Region. Christians also reside in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon Region in the middle of the country, where Islam is deeply intertwined with Pular (Fulani or Peuhl) culture and society. Indigenous religious beliefs are most prevalent in the Forest Region.

Participation in formal religious services and rituals is high as a result of the close ties between traditional cultural rituals and religious practices.

Immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same religious beliefs as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of indigenous religious practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The constitution provides for the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice the religion of their choice. Protection of religious freedom has not been tested through legal or judicial processes. During the 2008 military takeover, the military junta suspended the constitution; although in May 2010, a new constitution confirmed the right to religious freedom and forbade any revision of this principle.

The Secretariat of Religious Affairs aims to promote better relations among religious denominations and ameliorate interethnic and interreligious tensions. On January 14, 2009, the junta appointed a new secretary general of religious affairs and elevated the position to cabinet level. The secretary general of religious affairs actively promoted religious tolerance and appointed six national directors to lead the offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs and the Endowment, and General Inspector.

The transitional government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, Eid al-Fitr, Tabaski, and Christmas.

The government continues to coordinate with the Interreligious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Secretariat of Religious Affairs. The secretariat invited all religious groups to participate in recent public forums addressing globalization, religion, and other topics. The secretariat also consulted with the council on the management of Conakry's multid denominational cemetery.

All religious groups newly operating in the country must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs. Registration entitles religious organizations to value added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and select energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate; however, they were not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. Unregistered religious groups are subject to expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. The government did not expel any religious groups during the reporting period.

Prior to being registered by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs, all religious organizations must be approved by the Secretariat of Religious Affairs. During the reporting period, the government registered all groups that submitted applications. The small Baha'i community practiced its faith openly and freely, although it did not request official recognition.

Islamic schools are prevalent throughout the country and are considered the traditional forum for religious education. Islamic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region.

There are a few madrassahs (schools), which differed from Islamic schools, across the country. These schools are usually associated with a mosque, and some are supported with funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, other Gulf States, and Libya. The madrassahs are not formally linked with the public school system and are not recognized by the government because they teach only Arabic and Islam. Despite ongoing efforts the Ministry of Education has been unable to integrate the

madrassahs into the government financed "Franco-Arab" system, which offers religious instruction in addition to a curriculum comparable to the public schools.

The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry are government employees.

The government prohibits ownership of private radio and television stations by religious groups or political parties, but religious and political broadcasting is permitted on privately owned commercial radio. The government allocates broadcast time during the week for both Islamic and Christian programming on state-owned national television, including Sunday Mass, Islamic religious instruction, and Friday prayers from the central mosque.

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Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

Some non-Muslims claimed that the government continued to use its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. For example, universities close on Friday so Muslim students can go to mosque, but schedule classes on Sunday, preventing Christian students from attending church. Additionally, the Secretariat of Religious Affairs facilitated a pilgrimage to Mecca for some Muslims, but did not provide any similar service to the Christian community.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, in some parts of the country, strong cultural, social, and economic pressure discouraged conversion from Islam. The missionary community reported that while conversion from Islam to Christianity was allowed by the government, it sometimes resulted in rejection or persecution by families and communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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